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European Journalists Demand a Bigger Role In Guiding the Media

French Newspaper, Le Monde,
Provides Model; It Thrives
As Staff Influence Grows

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PARIS—As a veteran journalist specializing in foreign news analysis, Jean Schwoebel could be expected to view revolutions with a dispassionate professional eye. But there's one radical movement that he takes very personally.

"My fight is to expand the experience of Le Monde," he declares. "We are exporting a revolution."

Le Monde (the World) is the Paris newspaper that Mr. Schwoebel works for, and the revolution he advocates would give professional journalists policy control over what newspapers and magazines print and over what radio and television stations broadcast.

To most publishers and broadcasters, that is indeed a revolutionary idea. In most parts of the world, staff journalists are considered to be employees, not policy-makers, whether the medium they work for be owned privately or by the state. Policy is made by owners or administrators, not by rank-and-file journalists.

But the staff at Le Monde has taken part in policy decisions since 1951, and in the meantime the newspaper has come to be regarded as France's most independent and respected journal. Now the idea of demanding decision-making power is rapidly catching on among journalists elsewhere in France and in other parts of Europe.

At Strasbourg, France, last month, legislators from 17 nations at the Council of Europe consultative assembly voted unanimously to urge laws that would protect journalists from "outside pressures"—including the proprietors of their media.

"Sold Like Cows"

Some 32 French publications now have "societies of journalists" that are demanding a voice in management and, in some cases, voting stock. A federation of these societies, headed by Mr. Schwoebel, lobbied for the Strasbourg resolution.

Journalists at several West German newspapers and at the Hamburg weekly picture magazine Der Stern (the Star) have persuaded managements to sign "editorial statutes" assuring staff members they will not be pressured to write articles counter to their "consciences." Der Stern staffers used strike threats last year to defeat an attempt by printing magnate Richard Gruner to sell a 25% interest in the magazine to Heinrich Bauer, a publisher the staff considered too "commercial." Heinrich Jancnecke, a subeditor, says, "We don't agree to be sold like cows."

In Britain, a new "Free Communications Group" is trying to bring "newspapers, television and radio under the control of the people who produce them." The group is backing militants seeking control of the Fleet Street branch of the National Union of Journalists. And in

Rome last month, 450 Italian journalists set up a "Movement of Democratic Journalists for Freedom of the Press," which hopes to use collective bargaining to protect newsmen's independence.

A Block of Stock

The model for most of these activities is Le Monde. A Society of Journalists, headed by Mr. Schwoebel and comprising the entire editorial staff, has owned a block of Le Monde stock since 1951. Over the years, the newspaper has prospered and achieved a high degree of professional stature. It routinely scoops its competition on major stories and maintains a steady critique of government.

Le Monde's 32 tabloid-size pages are tightly packed with news and opinion, and there are no photographs, comic strips or other frills to mar its image as a serious journal. But it is commercially successful. Its earnings last year exceeded \$3 million, and it was forced to turn away advertising. This year it will complete a new plant at St. Denis, just north of Paris, that will enable it to expand to 48 pages.

The guiding genius of Le Monde for many years was Hubert Beuve-Mery, who founded the paper with two partners after German occupation of France ended in World War II. In 1951, Mr. Beuve-Mery had a falling-out with his partners over his opposition to the North Atlantic Treaty. He resigned, but Le Monde's staff refused to work without him. Eventually he returned and the staff formed its own society, which got 28% of the paper's stock and veto power over any future management changes.

In 1968, looking toward Mr. Beuve-Mery's retirement (which occurred late last year), the paper constructed an elaborate system of control designed to keep it free of outside influences in perpetuity. By creating additional shares of stock, Le Monde was able to raise the stock share of the Society of Journalists to 40% from 28%. Two other societies, representing supervisory and clerical workers, got 5% and 4% respectively. The managing director controls 7%, the administrative director 4% and Mr. Beuve-Mery and the other founders a total of 40%.

All major decisions—such as the nomination of a new managing director, changes in the company statute, the raising of capital or the liquidation of the company—require a 75% majority vote. No holder can sell stock, and on liquidation any capital gain would go to charity.

Aside from a small dividend to the founders, earnings are plowed back into the company or used to pay employee bonuses. Representatives of the employee groups sit on an advisory board to periodically review the paper's financial condition. The "directeur," or managing director, must always be a journalist.

Mr. Beuve-Mery's successor as managing director is Jacques Fauvet, 55, a wiry man with a poker face and a dry wit who was previously chief editor. He says he thinks participation will work at Le Monde as long as "everyone plays his part." He also feels, he says, that employee participation is more likely to work in journalism than in other fields.

"It would be hard to find another field where the intellectual part is as important," he says. "Editors are not like furniture."

But Mr. Fauvet has some reservations about how far participation can go. Some of them were made clear when he accepted his new job. He won general agreement that he has the right to run the paper, with control over hiring and firing, salaries, editorial policy

not act as a soviet," he says—though, of course, the society has the power to demand Mr. Fauvet's dismissal if it doesn't approve of his management.

A Greater Voice

The growing demand for journalistic participation in management is related, many observers feel, to a general demand in Europe for worker participation in many sorts of institutions. The effort by a new generation to break up Europe's old hierarchies was dramatically demonstrated in the May 1968 strikes and riots in France. The participants—students, teachers, nurses, factory workers, even priests—made it clear that they wanted a greater voice in decisions affecting them and their work.

Another reason for the journalistic uprising "is the simple fact that conditions for journalists and broadcasting producers are getting more difficult," says Neal Ascherson, one of the founders of Britain's Free Communications Group and a writer for the Observer, a London Sunday paper.

Concentration of ownership through acquisitions and mergers has meant that "editorial responsibility has been suffering as a result of papers falling into the hands of remote boards of businessmen," Mr. Ascherson says.

So far, there have been few instances of journalists in the U.S. demanding a greater voice in policy-making by their media. However, Melvin Mencher, a journalism professor at Columbia University, says he expects U.S. publishers and broadcasters to face more such demands in the future.

"We're seeing a much different type of young journalist nowadays," he says. "These people come out of universities where there's a preoccupation with society's problems and a tradition of activism, and they find ossification in some newspapers. They discover that editors and publishers are unaware of all sorts of trends in society, and the young journalists want to see that the facts get published. So they're turning their reformist impulses inward to their own profession."

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